Toward the Summit: View From the Oval Office

Transcript of President's Speech on Summit Talks Next Week

Following is a transcript of President Reagan's speech from the White House last night on the summit meeting in Geneva next week, as recorded by The New York Times:

My fellow Americans. Good evening. In 36 hours, I will be leaving for Geneva for the first meeting between an American President and a Soviet leader in six years. I know that you and the people of the world are looking forward to that meeting with great interest, so tonight I want to share with you my hopes and tell you why I am going to Geneva.

My mission, stated simply, is a mission for peace. It is to engage the new Soviet leader in what I hope will be a dialogue for peace that endures beyond my Presidency. It is to sit down across from Mr. Gorbachev and try to map out, together, a basis for peaceful discourse even though our disagreements on fundamentals will not change.

It is my fervent hope that the two of us can begin a process which our successors and our peoples can continue: facing our differences frankly and openly, and beginning to narrow and resolve them; communicating effectively so that our actions and intentions are not misunderstood; and eliminating the barriers between us and cooperating wherever possible for the greater good of all.

This meeting can be an historic opportunity to set a steady, more constructive course to the 21st century.

The history of American-Soviet relations, however, does not augur well for euphoria. Eight of my predecessors — each in his own way in his own time — sought to achieve a more stable and peaceful relationship with the Soviet Union. None fully succeeded. So I don't underestimate the difficulty of the task ahead. But these sad chapters do not relieve me of the obligation to try to make this a safer, better world. For our children, our grandchildren, for all mankind — I intend to make the effort. And with your prayers, and God's help, I hope to succeed.

The New York Times/George Tames

REAGAN MEETS WITH ARMS-CONTROL NEGOTIATORS: President Reagan conferring with members of the arms-control team yesterday at the White House. At meeting were Maynard W. Glitman, left; Max M. Kampelman, at rear by the President, and John G. Tower.

'Foundation for Lasting Peace'

Success at the summit, however, should not be measured by any short-term agreements that may be signed. Only the passage of time will tell us whether we constructed a durable bridge to a safer world.

This, then, is why I go to Geneva: To build a foundation for lasting peace.

When we speak of peace, we should not mean just the absence of war. True peace rests on the pillars of individual freedom, human rights, national self-determination, and respect for the rule of law. Building a safer future requires that we address candidly all the issues which divide us, and not just focus on one or two issues, important as they may be.

When we meet in Geneva, our agenda will seek not just to avoid war, but to strengthen peace, prevent confrontation, and remove the sources of tension. We should seek to reduce the suspicions and mistrust that have led us to acquire mountains of strategic weapons.

Since the dawn of the nuclear age, every American President has sought to limit and end the dangerous competition in nuclear arms. I have no higher priority than to finally realize that dream. I've said before, I will say again, a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

We've gone the extra mile in arms control, but our offers have not always been welcome.

In 1977 and again in 1982, the United States proposed to the Soviet Union deep reciprocal cuts in strategic forces. These offers were rejected, out-of-hand. In 1981, we proposed the complete elimination of a whole category of intermediate range nuclear forces. Three years later, we proposed parity for a global ban on chemical weapons.

In 1983, the Soviet Union got up and walked out of the Geneva nuclear arms control negotiations altogether. They did this in protest because we and our European allies had begun to deploy nuclear weapons as a counter to Soviet SS-20's aimed at our European and other allies.

I'm pleased now, however, with the interest expressed in reducing offensive weapons by the new Soviet leadership. Let me repeat tonight what I announced last week: The United States is prepared to reduce comparable nuclear systems by 50 percent. We seek reductions that would result in a stable balance between us, with no first strike capability, and verified, full compliance.

If we both reduce the weapons of war there would be no losers, only winners. And the whole world would benefit if we could both abandon these weapons altogether and move to nonnuclear defensive systems that threaten no one.

But nuclear arms control is not of itself a final answer. I told four Soviet political commentators two weeks ago that nations do not distrust each other because they're armed; they arm themselves because they distrust each other. The use of force, subversion, and terror has made the world a more dangerous place.

And thus, today, there's no peace in Afghanistan, no peace in Cambodia, no peace in Angola, Ethiopia or Nicaragua. These wars have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and threaten to spill over national frontiers.

A Regional Peace Plan

That's why in my address to the United Nations I proposed a way to end these conflicts, a regional peace plan that calls for negotiations among the warring parties, withdrawal of all foreign troops, democratic reconciliation and economic assistance.

Four times in my lifetime, our soldiers have been sent overseas to fight in foreign lands. Their remains can be found from Flanders field to the islands of the Pacific. Not once were those young men sent abroad in the cause of conquest. Not once did they come home claiming a single square inch of some other country as a trophy of war.

A great danger in the past, however, has been the failure by our enemies to remember that, while we Americans detest war, we love freedom and stand ready to sacrifice for it. We love freedom not only because it's practical and beneficial, but because it is morally right and just.

In advancing freedom, we Americans carry a special burden — a belief in the dignity of man in the sight of the God who gave birth to this country. This is central to our being.

A century and a half ago, Thomas Jefferson told the world, "The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs." Freedom is America's core. We must never deny it, nor forsake it. Should the day come when we Americans remain silent in the face of armed aggression, then the cause of America, the cause of freedom, will have been lost and the great heart of this country will have been broken.

This affirmation of freedom is not only our duty as Americans, it's essential for success at Geneva.

Possible Avenues of Cooperation

Freedom and democracy are the best guarantors of peace. History has shown that democratic nations do not start wars. The rights of the individual and the rule of law are as fundamental to peace as arms control. A government which does not respect its citizens' rights and its international commitments to protect those rights is not likely to respect its other international undertakings.

And that's why we must and will speak in Geneva on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves. We are not trying to impose our beliefs on others. We have a right to expect, however, that great states will live up to their international obligations.

Despite our deep and abiding differences, we can and must prevent our international competition from spilling over into violence. We can find as yet undiscovered avenues where American and Soviet citizens can cooperate, fruitfully, for the benefit of mankind. And this, too, is why I am going to Geneva.

Enduring peace requires openness, honest communications, and opportunities for our peoples to get to know one another directly.

The United States has always stood for openness. Thirty years ago in Geneva, President Eisenhower, preparing for his first meeting with the then Soviet leader, made his "Open Skies" proposal and an offer of new educational and cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union. He recognized that removing the barriers between people is at the heart of our relationship. He said:

"Restrictions on communications of all kinds, including radio and travel, existing in extreme form in some places, have operated as causes of mutual distrust. In America, the fervent belief in freedom of thought, of expression, and of movement is a vital part of our heritage."

I have hopes that we can lessen the distrust between us, reduce the levels of secrecy, and bring forth a more open world. Imagine how much good we could accomplish, how the cause of peace would be served, if more individuals and families from our respective countries could come to know each other in a personal way.

'All God's Children'

For example, if Soviet youth could attend American schools and universities, they could learn firsthand what spirit of freedom rules our land, and that we do not wish the Soviet people any harm. If American youth could do likewise, they could talk about their interests and values and hopes for the future with their Soviet friends. They would get firsthand knowledge of life in the U.S.S.R., but most important they would learn that we're all God's children with much in common.

Imagine if people in our nation could see the Bolshoi Ballet again, while Soviet citizens could see American plays and hear groups like the Beach Boys. And how about Soviet children watching "Sesame Street."

We've had educational and cultural exchanges for 25 years and are now close to completing a new agreement. But I feel the time is ripe for us to take bold new steps to open the way for our peoples to participate in an unprecedented way in the building of peace.

Why shouldn't I propose to Mr. Gorbachev at Geneva that we exchange many more of our citizens from fraternal, religious, educational and cultural groups? Why not suggest the exchange of thousands of undergraduates each year, and even younger students who would live with a host family and attend schools or summer camps? We could look to increase scholarship programs, improve language studies, conduct courses in history, culture, and other subjects, develop new sister cities, establish libraries and cultural centers, and, yes, increase athletic competition.

People of both our nations love sports. If we must compete, let it be on the playing fields and not the battlefields.

In science and technology we could launch new joint space ventures and establish joint medical research projects. In communications, we'd like to see more appearances in the other's mass media by representatives of both our countries; if Soviet spokesmen are free to appear on American television, to be published and read in the American press, shouldn't the Soviet people have the same right to see, hear, and read what we Americans have to say?

Such proposals will not bridge our differences, but people-to-people contacts can build genuine constituencies for peace in both countries. After all, people don't start wars, governments do.

Let me summarize, then, the vision and hopes that we carry with us to Geneva.

We go with an appreciation, both of experience, of the deep differences between us — between our values, our systems, our beliefs. But we also carry with us the determination not to permit those differences to erupt into confrontation or conflict.

We do not threaten the Soviet people and never will.

We go without illusion, but with hope — hope that progress can be made on our entire agenda.

We believe that progress can be made in resolving the regional conflicts now burning on three continents — including our own hemisphere. The regional plan we proposed at the United Nations will be raised again at Geneva.

We are proposing the broadest people-to-people exchanges in the history of American-Soviet relations, exchanges in sports and culture, in the media, education, and the arts. Such exchanges can build in our societies thousands of coalitions for cooperation and peace.

Governments can only do so much: once they get the ball rolling, they should step out of the way and let people get together to share, enjoy, help, listen and learn from each other, especially young people.

Finally, we go to Geneva with the sober realization that nuclear weapons pose the greatest threat in human history to the survival of the human race, that the arms race must be stopped. We go determined to search out, and discover, common ground — where we can agree to begin the reduction, looking to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth.

It is not an impossible dream that we can begin to reduce nuclear arsenals, reduce the risk of war and build a solid foundation for peace. It is not an impossible dream that our children and grandchildren can some day travel freely back and forth between America and the Soviet Union, visit each other's homes, work and study together, enjoy and discuss plays, music, television and root for teams when they compete.

These, then, are the indispensable elements of a true peace: the steady expansion of human rights for all the world's peoples; support for resolving conflicts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that carry the seeds of a wider war; a broadening of people-to-people exchanges that can diminish the distrust and suspicion that separate our two peoples; and the steady reduction of these awesome nuclear arsenals until they no longer threaten the world we both must inhabit. This is our agenda for Geneva; this is our policy; this is our plan for peace.

'We Have Cooperated'

We have cooperated in the past. In both world wars, Americans and Russians fought on separate fronts, against a common enemy. Near the city of Murmansk, sons of our own nation are buried, heroes who died of wounds sustained on the treacherous North Atlantic and North Sea convoys that carried to Russia the indispensable tools of survival and victory.

While it would be naive to think a single summit can establish a permanent peace, this conference can begin a dialogue for peace. So we look to the future with optimism and we go to Geneva with confidence.

Both Nancy and I are grateful for the chance you've given us to serve this nation and the trust you've placed in us. I know how deep the hope of peace is in her heart, as it is in the heart of every American and Russian mother.

I received a letter and picture from one such mother in Louisiana recently. She wrote, "Mr. President, how could anyone be more blessed than I? These children you see are mine, granted to me by the Lord for a short time. When you go to Geneva, please remember these faces. Remember the faces of my children — of Jonas, than, my son, and of my twins, Laura and Jessica. Their future depends on your actions. I will pray for guidance for you and the Soviet leaders."

Her words "my children" read like a cry of love. And I could only think how that cry has echoed down through the centuries, a cry for all the children of the world, for peace, for love of fellow man.

Here is the central truth of our time, of my time, a truth to which I have tried to bear witness in this office.

When I first accepted the nomination of my party, I asked you, the American people, to join with me in prayer for our nation and the world. Six days ago, in the Cabinet Room, religious leaders, Ukrainian and Greek Orthodox Bishops, Catholic Church representatives including a Lithuanian bishop, Protestant pastors, a Mormon elder and Jewish rabbis, made me a similar request.

Well tonight, I'm honoring that request. I'm asking you, my fellow Americans, to pray for God's grace and His guidance, for all of us, at Geneva, so that the cause of true peace among men will be advanced, and all of humanity thereby served.

Good night, God bless you.

Reagan Calls for Broad Exchange of U.S. and Soviet Young People

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ing exhibitions.

Meanwhile, Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, said there would be no agreement at the summit on halting the spread of chemical weapons. On Wednesday, Administration officials said the two countries were poised to announce an accord.

Mr. Speakes said that the United States had rejected a Soviet proposal made at the arms control negotiations in Geneva for each side to cut its land-based missile force by 300 missiles. He said that the offer did not meet "our criteria of stability, balance and equity."

Secretary of State George P. Shultz in a subsequent news conference said that the offer, which accompanied detailed Soviet proposals last month, was not being taken seriously by the United States. He said no arms accords of any significance were expected to emerge.

Officials said President Reagan's television speech today could be construed as seeking to set a positive tone for the first summit meeting since 1979, when President Carter conferred with Leonid I. Brezhnev in Vienna.

Although Mr. Reagan accused the Soviet Union of having rejected efforts to limit nuclear weaponry, he said "nuclear arms control is not of itself a final answer."

He then focused on the need "for our peoples to get to know one another directly" as a step toward peace.

"Despite our deep and abiding differences, we can and must prevent our international competition from spilling over into violence," Mr. Reagan said. "I have hopes that we can lessen the distrust between us, reduce the levels of secrecy, and bring forth a more open world.

"For example, if Soviet youth could attend American schools and universities, they could learn first-hand what spirit of freedom rules our land, and that we do not wish the Soviet people any harm. If American youth could do likewise, they could talk about their interests and values and hopes for the future with their Soviet friends.

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Mr. Reagan urged "bold new steps to open the way for our peoples to participate in an unprecedented way in the building of peace."

"Why shouldn't I propose to Mr. Gorbachev at Geneva that we exchange many more of our citizens from fraternal, religious, educational and cultural groups?" Mr. Reagan said. "Why not suggest the exchange of thousands of undergraduates each year, and even younger students who would live with a host family and attend schools or summer camps?

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Mr. Reagan also urged joint space and medical research projects.

"We are proposing the broadest people-to-people exchanges in the history of American-Soviet relations, exchanges in sports and culture, in the media, education and the arts," he said. "Such exchanges can build in our societies thousands of coalitions for cooperation and peace.

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